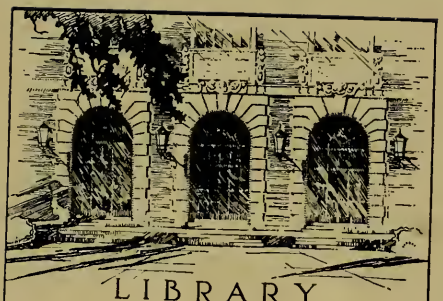

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WHO ARE INSULTING

THE

WORKING CLASSES?

As a working man I wish to say a few words to my brother working men upon one or two matters which concern us all.

Most of us read the newspapers, though perhaps not very regularly, but we think we know pretty fairly what is going on in this Island Home of ours; and we think, too, we are capable of forming our opinions thereupon.

For some months past I have been attentively noting the speeches made by some of our leading men, and the statements made by some of the daily newspapers, upon matters political and of national importance. I read an immense amount of abuse against the Government of the day, heaped up in no stinted measure, and conveyed in language we working men scarcely expect to find used among gentlemen.

Now I call myself a Liberal of the old school, and I like to look at public matters from a wide and Liberal point of view, but I am amazed when I read statements that the policy of the present Government is a policy of war; that the long commercial trial and depression of trade are due to the present Government; that the prospect of a bad harvest, and I know not how many other bad things are due to the same cause, and all these statements made in language so violent that even a Liberal paper has described it as "noise and bluster," and has added with respect to a speech made by one of the leaders in the House of Commons, "We feel, for our part, ashamed that any English politician who holds a respectable position should condescend to this kind of Billingsgate."

Now I have been thinking *what can be the reason* these men speak and write in so abusive a manner, and why are they scattering about statements that are untrue, and arguments utterly illogical? Well, I think I have discovered the reason. I feel certain they cannot themselves believe the wild statements they make, but it has flashed across my mind that they think we working men will believe them and be influenced by them. They well know the power we can exercise in the coming general election, and they expect to win us in this way to use our influence to turn the present Government out of office, and to bring them and their friends in. Now I feel indignant, terribly indignant, that we working men thould be insulted, *grossly insulted*, in this kind of manner. We are being treated as fools. We are thought to be so ignorant that we cannot read and judge for ourselves, and that we shall swallow all these abusive and false utterances as if they were Gospel truth. We are told that the Conservative policy is, and has ever been, a policy of war. Now I am old enough to remember the public matters of the last over forty years, and I know that fourteen wars have been commenced during that period. Of these fourteen eleven were commenced by Liberals, and three by Conservatives. I can give the actual cases:—I. Affghan War, October 1, 1838, Lord Melbourne, L.; II. Chinese war, June 28, 1840, Lord Melbourne, L.; III. Syrian war, November 3, 1840, Lord Melbourne, L.; IV. Kaffir war, December 31, 1850, Lord John Russell, L.; V. Crimean war, March 27, 1854, Lord Aberdeen and W. E. Gladstone, L.; VI. Chinese war, October 23, 1856, Lord Palmerston, L.; VII. Persian war, November 1, 1856, Lord Palmerston, L.; VIII. New Zealand war, June 30, 1860, Lord Palmerston, L.; IX. Chinese war, August 12, 1860, Lord Palmerston, L.; X. New Zealand war, November 20, 1863, Lord Palmerston, L.; XI. Ashantee war, September 29, 1873, W. E. Gladstone, L.; I. Abyssinian war, November 6, 1866, B. Disraeli, C.; II. Affghan war, 1878, Lord Beaconsfield, C.; III. Zulu war, 1878, Lord Beaconsfield, C. We are treated as though we knew nothing of these actual occurrences, and as if we should believe, without any thought or inquiry, the false statement that the Conservative policy, and not the Liberal, is the policy of war. We are supposed to be entirely ignorant of the views of past statesmen—and they were gentlemen—on these subjects, as though we had never read Mr. Cobden's words, spoken in the House of Commons, "I declare before God and this House that I believe if the Tory Government had been in power we should have had no Crimean war!"

Not a word about our national prosperity. Here again are we

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working men being insulted by the same wild statements and extravagant abuse. Are we weak enough to know no better than to believe that the Conservative Government has caused depression in trade? Do not we know well enough that a considerable amount of our trade has gone to other countries, and what has the present Government to do with that? Do we not know that much misery and depression have been caused by commercial speculation—and what has the Conservative Government to do with that? Increased taxes! bad harvests! unfavourable weather!—all due to the Conservative Government—and we working men are supposed to be weak and ignorant enough to believe it all. Let us turn again to a few facts. Taxation! Do we not remember that under Lord John Russell the income tax rose at once from 7d. to 1s. in the pound? Taxation! Do they suppose we are not educated enough to calculate? Why, in the last five years of Mr. Gladstone's Government the taxation *per head* for the five years amounted to £10 7s. 0¾d. This calculation is based upon the figures given in a *Financial Reform Almanack*, a Radical authority. And in the five years of Lord Beaconsfield's Government the taxation *per head* for the five years amounted to £10 3s. 0¾d.—a balance of 4s. per head in favour of the present Government, or a total amount of more than six and a-half millions. Mr. Gladstone, with all his immense talent, utterly fails to weaken the force of this fact, though he tries hard to do so. Moreover, I have been able to learn from the newspapers that the Bank rate was 8½ per cent. in November, 1873, just before Mr. Gladstone resigned. It has never been higher than 6 per cent. since, and has not averaged 4 per cent. I could express an opinion, much more sensibly I hope than the wild statements I have referred to, respecting the principal causes of commercial depression, but I am anxious to bring the present paper to a close. Before doing so let me candidly tell these writers and speakers whose arguments are all reviling, and whose policy is all abuse, that we working men are not to be won by these weapons.

I have myself heard language on these matters that no Christian man *would*, and no English gentleman *could*, ever use. Now we do like to be represented in our House of Commons by English gentlemen, and we do like to be treated as though we could weigh sound argument, and were not to be influenced merely by low and violent abuse. We know we have now a Government in office that has kept our country in calmness and peace during long depression and violent agitations—that has preserved peace with the nations of Europe in spite of immense difficulties—that has raised our national credit and

influence among all the other nations of the earth—and that is honestly doing its utmost to promote the happiness and welfare of all classes of the community. The thoughtful portion of the country are mindful and observing of these things, and as an old Liberal I want to give full credit for them also. I love my country more than I ever did my party, and believing that for the country's good the old Liberals would have acted just as the present Government have done, I wish now to give whatever small support I can to Lord Beaconsfield and his Government. I should much wish to say more to my brother working men upon the political parties of the future, upon our leading public men, and upon one or two other subjects. Perhaps I may do so in future papers.

A WORKING MAN.